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UNCLAS VATICAN 004429

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CU](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: CUBA STEPPING UP PRESSURE ON CATHOLIC CHURCH

REF: VATICAN 1775

1. (SBU) "FIDEL CASTRO SEES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AS AN ENEMY," HAVANA'S CARDINAL JAIME ORTEGA ASSERTED IN DESCRIBING CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS ON THE COMMUNIST ISLAND DURING A RECENT VISIT TO ITALY. INTERVIEWED BY ITALIAN BISHOPS' DAILY "AVVENIRE," THE CARDINAL SUMMARIZED THE CHURCH'S SITUATION IN CUBA AS BEING "UNDER SIEGE." HE SPOKE OF A "SUBTLE BATTLE AGAINST THE CHURCH, WHICH IS SEEN AS A PRIVATE ENTITY TO BE MARGINALIZED SO AS NOT TO ROB THE REVOLUTION OF ITS STRENGTH AND ENERGY." THE CARDINAL'S COMMENTS ARE IN LINE WITH RECENT COMMENTS WE HAVE HEARD FROM THE SECRETARIAT OF STATE, WHICH HAS SHOWN INCREASING IRRITATION WITH THE REPRESSIVE ACTIONS OF THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT. SPEAKING ABOUT CUBA IN A RECENT MEETING, THE DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER SHOOK HIS HEAD AND SAID: "ENOUGH IS ENOUGH."

2. (U) CARDINAL ORTEGA, IN ITALY FOR A "SISTER CITY" EVENT, SAID THAT ALTHOUGH POPE JOHN PAUL II'S 1998 VISIT TO CUBA HAD GENERATED A POSITIVE SPIN-OFF FOR THE CHURCH, THIS WAS LIMITED TO THE SOCIAL LEVEL. FOR EXAMPLE, THE VISIT HAD HELPED FACILITATE THE WORK OF CATHOLIC RELIEF AGENCY CARITAS, AND THE CHURCH'S CARE FOR THE SICK AND POOR.

3. (U) ORTEGA SPOKE OF A WIDESPREAD DESIRE AMONG CUBANS TO EMIGRATE, ESPECIALLY AMONG THE YOUNG. WHEN ASKED IF DIALOGUE WITH THE CASTRO REGIME WAS POSSIBLE, THE CARDINAL QUOTED FROM ONE OF THE POPE'S SPEECHES IN HAVANA - "ONLY DIALOGUE WILL RESOLVE DIFFICULTIES". ORTEGA INDICATED THAT HE WOULD PURSUE THIS STRATEGY "EVEN IF PROBLEMATIC".

4. (U) "AVVENIRE" REPORTED ON THE SAME PAGE A RECENT CUBAN BISHOPS' DOCUMENT THAT LAMENTS THE REGIME'S IDEOLOGICAL RETURN TO THE EARLY DAYS OF THE REVOLUTION WITH ITS CONCURRENT OPPRESSIVE ANTI-CATHOLICISM. OF GREATEST CONCERN TO THE PRELATES HOWEVER WAS THE SENSE OF HOPELESSNESS AMONG ORDINARY CUBANS, ALONG WITH THE DAILY STRUGGLE TO MAKE ENDS MEET AND A RESULTING DESIRE TO EMIGRATE.

5. (SBU) COMMENT: CARDINAL ORTEGA'S REMARKS REFLECT THE CONTINUING DISAPPOINTMENT OF THE CUBAN CHURCH OVER THE LACK OF MOVEMENT SINCE POPE JOHN PAUL II'S "HOPE FILLED" 1998 VISIT. ORTEGA IS A REALIST -- THUS HIS CONTINUING PREFERENCE FOR DIALOGUE TO MAKE THE BEST OF THE IDEOLOGICAL CHASM BETWEEN COMMUNISM AND CATHOLICISM. WHILE THE HOLY SEE ITSELF OFFICIALLY PROMOTES A SIMILAR COURSE OF ENGAGEMENT, THE POPE'S FORCEFUL CONDEMNATION OF CASTRO'S APRIL EXECUTIONS AND DETENTIONS, AND HIS PROMOTION OF DEMOCRACY FOR THE ISLAND (REFTEL) INDICATE THE VATICAN'S OWN DEEPENING FRUSTRATION WITH THE CUBAN REGIME AND ITS RECENT ACTIONS. FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE, THE VATICAN IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE TO AUGMENT THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL PRESENCE FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE CUBAN PEOPLE WHILE ALSO PROTESTING DETENTIONS DIRECTLY WITH THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT AND SPEAKING OUT AS OPPORTUNITIES PRESENT THEMSELVES TO HIGHLIGHT THEIR OPPOSITION TO CUBAN HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES.

NICHOLSON

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